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ABSTRACT

One of the main obstacles to effective faculty evaluation is the inability to reach consensus on the evaluation's intended purpose. On one hand, faculty evaluation has a formative purpose, supporting faculty development, growth, and self-improvement, while it also has a summative purpose in that it provides data to make personnel decisions on tenure, promotion, reappointment, and salary. Since the 1970's there has been debate over whether an evaluation system can be both formative and summative, and still be effective. One of the few points of agreement is the need for multiple sources of input. Possible sources of evaluation data include self-evaluation, evidence of student achievement, alumni evaluations, and instructor performance tests, with the most common source being student evaluations of teacher performance. Two major problems in establishing successful faculty evaluation programs are administration disinterest in whether or not faculty succeed and faculty resistance. Faculty fear that evaluations purported to encourage development and growth will be used to make decisions on tenure, promotion, and dismissal. Despite the lack of clarity over the goals of evaluation and the most appropriate methodology, community college practitioners generally agree that evaluation is a necessary part of teaching and learning. The ideal system of evaluation would be a non-normative or criterion-referenced system that appraises faculty according to a set of professional standards and encourages professional development rather than discourages it. (KP)

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Digest

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The Status and Scope of Faculty Evaluation

by Tronie Rifkin

Ever since the 1970s when faculty evaluation in the community college first became an issue of discussion and research, there has yet to develop a clear faculty evaluation theory. In spite of the many programs and the extensive research on performance appraisal, few community colleges have effectively come to terms with this difficult task. In fact, in the last 10 years research focused on faculty evaluation practices at two-year colleges has been limited.

This digest examines the issues surrounding faculty evaluation in community colleges. It focuses on the controversy over the purpose of faculty evaluation, who is doing the evaluation, and the problems faculty evaluation programs face.

Can Faculty Evaluation Be Both Formative and Summative?

One of the main obstacles to effective faculty evaluation has been the inability of community college practitioners to reach consensus on the intended purposes of faculty evaluation programs. Viewed broadly, evaluation of faculty is the gathering of information for understanding and improving performance as well as judging its quality. Smith (1983) notes that The Southern Regional Education Board, in a regional survey of faculty evaluation practices in 1976, reduced faculty evaluation to two purposes. On one hand, faculty evaluation has a formative purpose—the results are used to support faculty development, growth, and self-improvement. On the other hand, faculty evaluation has a summative purpose—the results are used to make personnel decisions on tenure, promotion, reappointment, and salary. Since the 1970s, there has been debate over whether an evaluation system can be both formative and summative, and still be effective.

Early on, one side of the debate demanded that evaluation for faculty growth be kept separate from evaluations for promotion and retention (Cohen 1974; Buchanan, 1974). While many of the faculty evaluation models that have been developed often emphasize this separation, early writers on the subject (Mark, 1977; Miller, 1972) already had observed that no evaluation programs adequately outlined how these two purposes could be separated.

The inability to devise faculty evaluation programs that separate formative and summative purposes has fueled the argument that supports the incorporation of both purposes into the evaluation process. Results of research on post-tenure faculty evaluation in community colleges in the north central United States conducted by Licata and Andrews (1990, 1991, 1992) has provided support to this side of the debate. The majority of community college faculty and administrators surveyed identified faculty development as the primary purpose of evaluation, with the provision of information on promotion, retention, dismissal, and normal salary increments as a secondary purpose. Licata and Andrews assert that aligned identification of primary and secondary purposes suggests "that institutions find a way to join both formative and summative results into the faculty evaluation plan" (1992, p. 55).

Obviously, the argument for the incorporation of both purposes is still not at all clear. Some studies have found that perceptions of what is considered to be the ideal methods and purposes of faculty evaluation may differ from perceptions of how evaluations are actually applied in practice. For example, Young and Gwalamubisi (1986) reported results similar to Licata and Andrews in that both faculty and administrators perceived improving instruction as the ideal practice and specific purpose of faculty evaluation. However, faculty and administrators differed significantly on the extent to which they perceived faculty evaluation was really used for administrative decision-making, instructional quality, and reporting to external agencies. Even though formative evaluation is considered a primary purpose of faculty evaluation among faculty and administrators, research suggests perceptions of how the results are used interferes with the overall success of evaluation systems that attempt to incorporate both purposes.

Who Is Doing the Evaluating?

One of the few points of agreement concerning faculty evaluation among community college practitioners is the need for multiple sources of input on individual faculty members. But a matter of debate concerns which sources provide the best results and in what combinations. A comprehensive list of eight methods of faculty evaluation were identified by Young and Gwalamubisi (1986): student ratings of instructors, peer judgment, self-evaluation, administrator observation of faculty, administrator judgment, evidence of student achievement, alumni evaluations, and instructor performance tests.

Student evaluation of teaching is the most common form of evaluation; Seldin (1984) found that administrators utilized student-rating data in two-thirds of 616 institutions surveyed. However, it is also the method that raises the most concerns. Cashin (1983) notes some of the general problems with student evaluations of faculty: over-interpretation, only one aspect of teaching reflected in the data, students not equipped to judge some aspects of teaching, and concerns for reliability and validity.

Evaluation by peers and administrators has received less attention than evaluation by students. Peer evaluation focuses on knowledge of subject matter, commitment to

teaching, or the c .alities of good teaching. Colleagues can also judge the course design and instructional materials of a particular instructor. Centra (1979) estimated that 27 percent of the two-year colleges use colleague evaluations to formally assess at least one-half of their faculty while 34 percent make no use of colleague evaluations.

Administrators ultimately play the major role in evaluation, but from a faculty perspective there is a concern with that role and the possible misuse of power (Cherry, Grant, & Kalinos, 1988). Evaluation by administrators is here to stay and as a consequence the contention between faculty and administrators over all aspects of the evaluation process is not likely to disappear. However, there is room for creative alternatives that will lessen the conflict. For example, the teaching portfolio offers an excellent alternative means of evaluating faculty that requires collaboration from peers and department chairs (Centra, 1993). With the portfolio, the chair and instructor must identify the goals of the evaluation, and carefully delineate the expectations for acceptable performance. Once these materials are prepared, a clear time table and the expected outcomes must be established.

What Problems Do Faculty Evaluation Programs Face?

Arreola (1983) found two major problems in establishing successful faculty evaluation programs: (1) the administration is not interested in whether or not they succeed, and (2) the faculty are resistant. According to Arreola faculty resistance to being evaluated is attributable to "a resentment of the implied assumption that faculty may be incompetent in their subject area, suspicion that they will be evaluated by unqualified people, and an anxiety that they will be held accountable for performance in an area in which they may have little or no training" (p. 86).

Often, faculty suspicion, fear, and concern about the evaluation process is based on their perceptions that in fact it is used for the purposes of making decisions about tenure, promotion, and dismissal (Mark, 1982). Says Mark, "What is called development, growth, and self-improvement today becomes the means by which decisions for institutional personnel management purposes are made tomorrow. Faculties become wary and suspicious of this double message involved in the evaluation system" (p. 168).

Conclusion

It is evident from the literature on faculty evaluation at community colleges that there are a number of different methods and approaches to faculty evaluation at community colleges. Despite the lack of clarity as to the goals of evaluation and their application, and who should be involved in the evaluation process, community college practitioners agree that evaluation is a necessary part of teaching and learning. They also agree in principal that evaluation should help instructors grow professionally, but are unclear as to how to achieve that goal.

One conclusion to be drawn is that an ideal system of faculty evaluation cannot be normative. A non-normative, or criterion referenced system, would appraise faculty members according to a set of professional standards rather than by comparing them to other employees. The thrust of the evaluation would encourage professional development rather than discourage it. In any case, there is a need for research to further address the development of responsible and effective faculty evaluation systems that consider enhancing the growth of the faculty member as an individual.

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